1:Sanders Z-5,4 (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1

Even when death is there, there is help. Who can bury the dead by himself? The village all cry together, they all suffer together, and the whole village buries him. He too is not far away from them. His soul roams around them and, as they say themselves, he watches them.[2]

The Agricultural Cooperative Movement in Greece

One could logically argue that a people with as many kinds of mutual aid as the Greek villagers should take readily to the cooperative organization designed to assist cooperators, through organized efforts, to achieve goals which they could not hope to satisfy individually. But the transition from informal mutual aid to an organized cooperative proves much more difficult than one would at first imagine. In the first place, since the village mutual-aid patterns are a "here and now" undertaking, those participating can see the immediate results of their labor and can hold the person helped accountable to return assistance to them when needed. The formal cooperative organizations, on the other hand, have to set goals which are removed both in time and place from the average peasant. Not only are the centers of financial control and the markets distant, but the member has to wait for benefits to accrue in the case of a marketing cooperative. In a credit cooperative, the loan received is more tangible, but its attainment has probably seemed to the peasant a long, laborious procedure.

The transition from village mutual aid to the formal cooperative organization is difficult, in the second place, because the *formal* organization itself is an urban rather than a village development. To participate in and guide an organization takes as much "know-how" as repairing a tractor or managing a flock. But it is a different kind of skill from any which the peasant has been trained to use, and he is therefore either ill at ease or grossly inefficient when he tries to work with such a new social mechanism. Parliamentary procedure, the keeping of books and membership lists, and the preparation of reports go on around him all of the time, but he is seldom called upon to participate in such activity. This means that, as a member, he is apt to be passive and apathetic; he is also apt not to understand much of what is done in the cooperative organization and is therefore chronically critical of management, the government, and perhaps the whole idea of formal cooperatives in general. Once he has learned to deal with the social mechanism of the organization, he is much more self-assured and agreeable, but getting to this point takes a great deal of time for most villagers.

But perhaps a third difficulty in the transition from local mutual aid to membership in the cooperative society is most crucial. Basically the mutual-aid groups consist of family members and neighbors; only occasionally do they even call upon others in the village. The cooperative association makes an immediate leap beyond family and neighborhood to encompass men from the whole village — men who know each other but who have not

1:Sanders Z-5,4 (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1

783 748 Pierce College. It is hard for most Greeks, no matter how highly trained, to bring into the social worker–client relationship an objectivity modeled on the doctor–patient relationship. The Greek social worker finds it difficult to think of the client as a case and almost immediately empathizes or scolds in a way that would be considered quite unprofessional by American standards. Psychiko, hardly the twentieth-century rationale for social welfare, continues strong in Greece today, and the Bishop of Messenia is doing much to keep it alive in his diocese, which seems much the better for it.

The Peasant Confronts Death

761 773 ●775 The peasant assumes that there is an afterlife and talks about doing kind deeds "for the good of the soul." But these practical villagers do not talk much about death, although they do have some fixed beliefs and prescribed customs which stand them in good stead when confronting it. For example, there is the matter of Charon who, according to the beliefs of ancient Rome, was the boatman transporting the dead across the River Styx. I shall never forget the sensation of riding along in the northern Peloponnesos between Kleitoria and Kalavryta, enjoying the bright May afternoon, when my interpreter pointed out a small and pleasant stream said to be the waters of the Styx.[17] Greek peasants do not assign the same role to Charon as did the Romans, for they think of Charon as death itself, or as the angel of death whom God sends down to bring back the soul of someone whose time on earth has run its course. There are many songs and stories about Charon, who is personified as one who wrestles with individuals for their lives or who uses craft to draw the soul out of the body. From time to time he is supposed to have displayed something akin to human sympathy:

> *God and Death:* Once upon a time God sent death to reap a soul but when death heard the lamentation of the relations and saw the beauty of the girl whose soul he was supposed to reap, he felt sorry and returned to heaven without accomplishing his mission. When God asked him why he didn't bring the soul, death replied that he couldn't stand the crying and despair that he had heard and seen. God got very angry and hit death so that he became deaf, blind, and lame. He made him deaf so that he couldn't hear the crying, blind so that he couldn't see whether the soul to be taken away belonged to an old person or a child, and lame so that he could not run away from the place where he was sent.[18]

761 775 [772] Although church art, depicting the medieval Christian conception of heaven and hell, has had some effect upon the view peasants take of "the next world," the people very often reveal a more basic belief in Hades as "a common meeting-place of all whose lives are ended, without distinction of merit. Death is a deprivation of the joys of life, which, with all its troubles and cares, is sweet. The old uneasy feeling that after death it is

1:Sanders Z-5,4 (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1

not well is ever present; and the dying man laments that he must see the sun no more, nor the light of the moon, the mountains, the shade of plane-trees, and the cool fountain because in Hades there breaks no dawn, and sings no bird, and no fountains of water flow." [19]

This same theme is brought out in the tradition which the villagers call the "water of forgetfulness."

> Each person upon dying goes to the underworld. There he starts crying and is in despair because he died and had to leave the world which still seems so sweet to him. The other dead laugh at him. This happens for just one day because the other dead feel sorry for the newcomer, take him to a spring and tell him to drink some water. After he has had some he in his turn forgets the upper world and laughs at the newcomers who come later on. This happens to all who die.[20]

When a person is believed to be dying, a candle is lit, probably so the soul will be sure to have some light as it moves into the other world. If any of this candle remains after a person dies, according to some village people, for three successive days you must put water in a little coffee cup and light the candle for ten minutes after sunset. You then take the water and throw it outside where nobody will be apt to walk on it. You also cut a narrow piece from the shroud and tie three knots in it, placing it in front of the icon. For three days you untie one of the knots and then sew the piece of cloth in the shirt of one of the male members of the family, who wears this piece until the shirt wears out. In the Naupaktos area, after a person dies all windows and doors are closed so death cannot get out. One person of the household shouts, "Death, leave the old man [or whoever is dead]." This is repeated many times in the hope that death can hear. It is done, the people say, to keep death from coming again to take someone else from that home.[21] Such shouting is not the custom in all parts of Greece, however.

What one does find quite generally in the rural areas, however, is the *myriologion*, or funeral dirge, which the women of the household and those from the neighborhood begin to sing as soon as death has come. Some of these have been conventionalized to the point that several women may all know the same dirge for a husband, child, or mother, and sing parts of it in turn rocking back and forth; in some parts of Greece the women improvise dirges in keeping with the prescribed musical form. These songs, sung in the house before burial, at the grave at stated intervals after death, or even as a woman is passing by the cemetery, may consist of questions put to the dead: "Why did you leave us?" "Why did you go so soon?" "How do you think the house can get on without you?" [22] Those myriologia that have traditional content passed on from generation to generation are the source of many of the popular beliefs about the afterlife, and they illustrate as well as any aspect of Greek rural life the persistence of pre-Christian

1:Sanders Z-5,4 (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1
Vlach EH15.

G 764 533 [562] [369] traits. From time to time, the men of the village may scoff at these myriologia as "women's business," and they certainly do not join in the singing, but many of them would feel uncomfortable if these dirges were not sung in their homes when occasion demanded. In the cities such customs as these are dying out, but not among the rural people.

The body is washed in wine and prepared for burial, with the interment usually taking place within twenty-four hours. A most vividly recalled procession was that of a seventeen-year-old boy in Metsovo (Epirus) who had been killed the day before by a land mine left over from the guerrilla war. This was a Wallachian (Koutso-Vlach) town, mentioned in my description of the life of the shepherd. We watched the procession form just outside the church. First came a boy carrying the lid of the coffin, since it is still customary to leave the coffin open as the procession moves through the streets of the town; then the altar boys carrying the banners, followed by three priests in their liturgical robes, then the coffin — all in white — carried by six young men in black homespun. Next followed the boy's father, supported by his relatives, a weeping fourteen-year-old brother, then a score of other men. The children from the school playground went up to watch the procession pass. Shortly afterwards, the mother, loudly wailing, came out of the church, also supported by her relatives and about forty or fifty women dressed in their traditional holiday costumes, brilliant despite the absence of much of their finery and the heavy accent of black trimmings. They formed a second procession which headed up a hill to the family home because in Metsovo, unlike the villages which are ethnically Greek, the women do not go to the cemetery. The grandmother, easily identified, was striking herself on the head in a display of grief.

G V 764 152 As the two processions went their separate ways, the square remained quiet and even the children seemed hushed in their play. At such moments it is apparent that in a village the family is not alone in its grief, but feels strongly the bonds that bind it to the rest of the community. Although death does mean separation, the villagers deal with it in a way that reinforces the social ties among the living. And grief has its rituals, too, which come down from prehistoric times. Women are supposed to express themselves loudly and in public, giving outlet to their pent-up emotions and freeing themselves from the repressions that might otherwise build up. Men, too, can cry in public, although they prefer to do it in the presence of other men rather than before women.

G 764 775 In watching the progress of a funeral procession in another village, I noticed that, with its approach, the doors and windows of shops and houses all shut down tightly, but only until the procession passed. Some said this was done "so the evil could not get through" to the living, but people in the village of Terpitsa claimed that they shut the doors so that only the door of the other world would remain open to the dead person.[22]

1:Sanders Z-5,√ (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1

Throughout Greece, even in the cities, people never go to their own home or a friend's home from a funeral without first stopping somewhere for a sweet. In many villages it is the custom to wash one's hands before entering the house.

The official period of mourning lasts for two years. Part of the complex of traits connected with mourning is the Feasts of the Dead held at fixed periods, such as the eighth and the fortieth day after burial. Similarly, on the anniversary of the death a feast of remembrance is held. On such occasions the grave is decorated with flowers, a mass is sung, and offerings of *kollyva* are made in the church. Kollyva is "parboiled wheat mixed with pounded walnuts, raisins and parsley, and covered over with a coating of sugar, with the sign of the cross, and sometimes the initials of the deceased worked on it in raisins. The wheat is interpreted as a symbol of the resurrection: as the grain is buried in the earth, rots, and rises again in the shape of a blooming plant, so will the soul rise from the tomb. . . ." [34]

In addition to these ceremonies for deceased individual members of a family, the Greek villagers also have collective feasts for the dead known as Souls' Sabbath (*psychosavvata*), which correspond roughly with spring and harvest, or the life and death cycle of the year. Relatives visit the graves where they leave sweetmeats, parboiled grain, and cakes, and where they kneel and cry beside the tombs as the priests read prayers over them. It is a memorable experience for a foreigner to come unexpectedly upon a graveyard where as many as one hundred and fifty people are wailing over different graves and to see the priests in their colorful robes and with their swinging censers move from one small group to the next.

Priests when they die are treated differently. With an ordinary person the bowl used when the dead are washed for burial is broken and thrown away; but with the priest (in Spetsai at least) it cannot be broken, but is thrown into the sea. The priest's body is not put in a shroud but is dressed by another priest in a *peritrachelion*, or stole which a priest wears when he hears confessions. Also, the first book from which the priest read after becoming a priest is put in the coffin with him. There is another difference, too. At the end of three years after burial, it is customary to dig up the bones of the deceased and wash them in wine and water, but the bones of a priest are washed with oil. When the bones are disinterred, they are put in a basket and taken home to be put under a table on which there is boiled wheat. The priest reads a prayer; the people kiss the skull, put it in the box with the other bones, and this is put in a vault in the cemetery.

Much is made of the condition of the bones. If they are yellowish-brown, this means that the person lived a good life; if they are black, he lived badly. It is also considered a bad omen if the body has not disintegrated.

An excellent summary of the way the peasant fits death into the general scheme of things comes from a study by V. T. Valassis:

1:Sanders Z-5H (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1

8. Alderfer, "Greece and the West Today," p. 8.

9. For observations on the village clergy, see Sir Charles Eliot, *Turkey in Europe* (London, 1908), and H. D. F. Kitto, *In the Mountains of Greece* (London, 1933), p. 16.

10. See Dorothy D. Lee, "Greek Tales of Priest and Priestwife," *Journal of American Folklore*, April–June 1947, p. 163. This article contains nine stories about the priest and his wife, some of them Chaucerian in tone. He is either interested in an attractive parishioner whose husband eventually deals drastically with him, or his wife is involved with a lover whom the priest may or may not outwit.

11. Angelike Chatzemichale made this observation.

12. The material for this whole paragraph is adapted from Anne Anthony, *Meet the Greeks* (Athens, 1950), pp. 37–41.

13. D. Lee, "Greece," *Cultural Patterns and Technical Change*, p. 84.

14. One of the most vivid accounts in English of the prominent role of the priest is found in Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Greek Passion* (New York, 1954), a fictionalized account of what happened in an Asia Minor Greek community when some of its characters in a passion play began to play their roles seriously in real life.

15. D. A. Petropoulos, "Ethima synergasias kai allelovoedeias tou hellenikou laou" (Customs of Collaboration and Mutual Aid of the Greek people), *Epeteris Laographikou Archeiou* (Yearbook of the Folklore Archives), 1943–1944, p. 71.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

17. See W. M. Leake's account of his explorations for the River Styx in chap. 26 (vol. 3) of his *Travels in the Morea*, 3 vols. (London, 1930).

18. From D. Kontogannis, *Sylloge demotikon paradoseon* (Collection of Popular Traditions) (Athens, 1920), p. 60.

19. Rennell Rodd, *The Customs and Lore of Modern Greece* (London, 1892), p. 120.

20. Kontogannis, *Sylloge*, p. 60.

21. D. Loukopoulos, "Symmeikta laographika en Aitolias," *Laographia*, XII (1938), 20–21.

22. Rennell Rodd, *Customs and Lore*, p. 129. See also Baron P. D'Estournelles, "The Superstitions of Modern Greece," *The Nineteenth Century*, no. 62 (1882), p. 590, who points out quite correctly that these dirge singers are frequently professionals employed to render this service. Lady Verney in an article on "Songs and Legends of Modern Greece," *The Contemporary Review* (1875), describes funeral customs which survive today: "The myriologia, or funeral songs, are always sung and composed by women . . . and are uttered first immediately after the death takes place. Next, when the body is laid on a bier, dressed in its best clothes, the face uncovered, turned to the east, the arms closed over the breast, the nearest relation begins her lamentation, and is followed by the more distant in blood; then the friends and the neighbors. Often messages are sent to those who have died previously; flowers and small presents for them are thrown on the body, which is entreated to carry them to the next world. . . . Hired mourners are often brought in to sing to the honour of the dead, as in the funeral of Hector, when Achilles has given up the body to his father."

23. Loukopoulos, "Symmeikta," p. 20.

24. G. F. Abbott, *Macedonian Folklore* (Cambridge, Eng., 1903), p. 208. He has an excellent chapter on funeral rites.

25. V. T. Valassis, "The Living Past and Technical Change" (unpublished master's thesis, University of Maryland, 1956), pp. 13–14.

Chapter XV. The Village Community

1. The best study of these Greek-American returnees is found in Theodore Saloutos, *They Remember America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956). H. D. F. Kitto,